

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 24, 2003

Co-Sponsor the Bipartisan Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2003

Original Cosponsor Deadline: June 26, at 5:00 p.m.

Dear Colleague:

We urge you to join us as an original cosponsor of the Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2003. This legislation will provide assistance to state and local law enforcement and amend federal law to streamline the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes. Last Congress this legislation had over 200 bipartisan cosponsors and we hope you join us again to help fight bias motivated crime.

The FBI has reported a dramatic increase hate motivated violence since the September 11th terrorist attacks. While the overall crime rate has grown by approximately two percent, the number of reported hate crimes have increased dramatically from 8,063 in 2000 to 9,730 in 2001 (a 20.7% increase). Racial bias again represented the largest percentage of bias-motivated incidents (44.9%), followed by Ethnic/National Origin Bias (21.6%), Religious Bias (18.8%), Sexual Orientation Bias (14.3%), and Disability Bias (0.4%). Although it is unclear how many of the 2001 reported hate crimes were directed at individuals in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks, we do know that the number of reported "anti-Islamic" crimes increased from 28 in 2000 to 481 in 2001, which represents an increase of over 1600%. In addition, the number of hate crimes directed at individuals on the basis of their national origin/ethnicity more than doubled -- from 911 in 2000 to 2,098 in 2001.

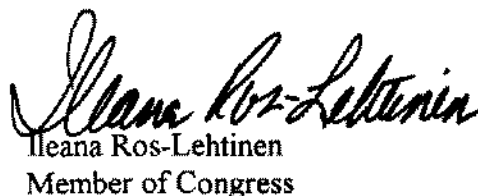
Current law limits federal jurisdiction over hate crimes to incidents that occur during the exercise of federally protected activities, such as voting, and does not permit federal involvement in a range of cases involving crimes motivated by bias against the victim's sexual orientation, gender or disability. This loophole is particularly significant given the fact that four states have no hate crime laws on the books, and another 21 states have extremely weak hate crimes laws. Our bill will remove these hurdles, so the federal government will no longer be constrained to wage the fight against hate crimes with one hand tied behind its back.

State and local authorities currently prosecute the overwhelming majority of hate crimes and will continue to do so under this legislation, with the enhanced support of the federal government. Through an Intergovernmental Assistance Program created by this legislation, the Justice Department will provide technical, forensic or prosecutorial assistance to state and local law enforcement officials in cases of bias crime. The legislation also authorizes the Attorney General to make grants to state and local law enforcement agencies that have incurred extraordinary expenses associated with the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes. Finally, under our bill, the Attorney General or other high ranking Justice Department officials must approve all prosecutions under this law, ensuring federal restraint, and further ensuring that the states will continue to take the lead.

The Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2003 is a constructive and measured response to a problem that continues to plague our nation -- violence motivated by prejudice. There is no more graphic a reminder of the hate violence than the shocking murders of James Byrd in Jasper, TX and Matthew Shepard in Wyoming. These crimes are especially destructive because their perpetrators seek not only to harm the immediate victim, but to make a statement to an entire community. To be an cosponsor of this legislation, or if you would like additional information, please contact Keenan Keller with Mr. Conyers office (x5-6906) or Muffy Lewis with Ms. Ros-Lehtinen (x5-3931).

Sincerely,


John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Member


Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress